Understanding the Culture of Low-Income Immigrant Latino Parents: Key to Involvement

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Abstract

Schools often consider themselves experts in a child's education. While school personnel are trained to work with children and families and certainly have much experience in the matter, the perspective and values of low-income parents are not always understood nor incorporated into the school culture. Since parent involvement has been shown to positively affect academic outcomes, it becomes important to understand the potential contributions that low-income parents can make to their children's education. This article describes a qualitative case analysis that examined what low-income immigrant Latino parents had to say about their parenting roles on *La Placita Bilingüe*, a live call-in radio talk show produced by Radio Bilingüe, the national Latino public radio network. Four themes that reflect the values of 18 parents emerged from the analysis of 11 hours of Spanish-language, live call-in shows: (1) the special place of children in the family; (2) *saber es poder* – knowledge is power; (3) *querer es poder* – where there is a will, there is a way; and (4) the importance of culture and of being bilingual.

Keywords: low income, immigrants, Latinos, Hispanics, parents, radio, qualitative research, minorities, school counseling, academics, culture, families

Introduction

Parents guide, nurture, and teach their children in the context of the family's language and culture. Despite knowing this, schools often take the position of

being the experts in a child's education, discounting a child's culture and background. And while schools may value parent involvement, parent participation is not a true partnership (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). The expertise of parents, particularly low-income parents, is rarely taken into account (Lott, 2001, 2003). Low-income immigrant parents are often viewed as being indifferent to their children's schooling, failing to encourage their children's achievement, and, in general, placing low value on education. Low-income parents, due to social class, have unequal resources with which to participate in their children's schools (Lareau, 1987). Immigrant parents also internalize racist beliefs prevalent in U.S. society and come to see themselves as deserving lower status (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005).

Much research has been devoted to the home-school partnership and the importance of parent involvement as essential for children's academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). Teachers, however, have reported having little knowledge about the at-home involvement of parents with less than a high school education (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999). While researchers have focused on the schools and the various strategies that school personnel can implement to improve parent involvement, there has been less research that takes into account the parents' frame of reference (Lawson, 2003). Minority parents, in particular, are untapped sources of knowledge and information about how minority children can be reached more effectively (Jones, 2003). One priority is fostering partnerships which engage parents and teachers in meaningful two-way communication, with both groups as active participants in the education of children (Baker et al.).

Research that focuses on parents and their points of view can help strengthen home-school partnerships. For example, from a participatory research project, Mawjee and Grieshop (2002) argue that language and culture must be taken into account in order to increase parental participation. Data from another study (Mapp, 2003) reveals that caring and trustful relationships with school staff enhances parents' desires to be involved in the schools. A focus group study of 34 parent leaders in a predominantly Mexican American school district finds that parents want teachers to be informed about the local Latino context as opposed to general Latino demographics (Jones, 2003).

A need exists to study low-income immigrant Latino parents in order to develop conceptual models that may explain how these parents view their participation in their children's lives and schooling. Too often the home-school partnership is studied from the point of view of school personnel, but not researched with respect to how the parents view their participation, particularly parents with few resources. What aspects of the social and cultural context in which these parents live and interact with their children are important for

school personnel to know? What theoretical constructs help us to shed light on the frame of reference of low-income immigrant Latino parents that would further develop the home-school partnership? Not only do we need to better understand how low-income immigrant parents see their participation in the schools, but equally important, research needs to be conducted in contexts that are unique to the lives of low-income participants (Lawson, 2003). This study turns to parents on a Spanish-language radio program to learn about what is important to them.

La Placita Bilingüe: The Village Square

This study examined parents who were volunteers on a radio program which is produced by Radio Bilingüe, the national Latino public radio network. On the air since 1998, La Placita Bilingüe is produced as a collaboration between Radio Bilingüe's Salinas, California station, KHDC 90.9 FM, and its Fresno, California station, KSJV 90.5 FM. Using an interactive conversational format in which guests call in to ask questions and state their opinions, the program recreates the brassy sounds of folksy music and the ambience of the plazas or placitas of Latin America, central gathering places in the communities where people come together to relax, exchange news, and share the latest happenings. La Placita Bilingüe was created with the idea that it would serve as a public medium for immigrant parents to discuss relevant parenting issues. The main author of this paper was the executive producer and host of La Placita Bilingüe during the first year of its airing. Previously, she had been a volunteer programmer and producer at Radio Bilingüe for fifteen years. Those experiences placed her in the unique position of a participant-observer and gave her multiple opportunities to interact with the parents.

Radio is considered to be an educational and empowering tool (Arnaldo, 1997; Jayaweera & Tabing, 1997; Price, 1997; Rockefeller Foundation, 1997), and for many less literate populations it is the medium of choice (Robinson, 1994; Solomon, 1997; Surlin, 1986). Radio can serve as an effective teaching tool and, in some cases, surpass traditional techniques (Bhola, 1989; Dave, Quane, & Perera, 1988). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has drawn attention to the educational potential of radio (Bhola) and at its 1985 Paris Conference recommended low-cost community radio, television, and other innovative technologies as a means to provide educational services (Dave et al.). Ethnographic studies in Latin America and in the U.S. (Hochheimer, 1993) acknowledge the role of radio as a successful educational and participatory medium (Crabtree, 1998; Huesca, 1995). Radio's popularity has to do with its capability for reaching large numbers of people, cost-effectiveness, and simplicity of use. It can also serve as a

culturally appropriate media tool, particularly since Spanish is the language of choice for many Latinos regardless of age and income. About 78% of Latinos living in the U.S. speak Spanish at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study was designed with the purpose of gaining fundamental knowledge about low-income immigrant Latino families and how they view their parenting roles in the United States. What do they value or prioritize as parents? The study presented in this article is a qualitative case analysis that describes and interprets what low-income immigrant Latino parents had to say about their parenting roles on a live call-in radio show, *La Placita Bilingüe*, a program produced by Radio Bilingüe, national Latino public radio in the United States.

Methodology

Participants

This study examines 11 hours of archival material containing 11 talk shows of *La Placita Bilingüe*. The number of parents on each of the shows varied from two to six for a total of 18 different parents on the 11 shows that are part of this study. Of the 18 parents, only 4 were on the air more than once, either two or three times each. Two of the 18 parents were not immigrants themselves, but they were the children of immigrants. Most of the parents were recruited at Head Start parent meetings in local areas. A few of the parents were recruited by professionals who worked at local agencies, usually non-profit agencies. All of the parents volunteered to be on the show and none had previous radio experience. The majority of the parents came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with most of them engaged as farm workers. The parents who make up this sample were invited to come into the studio and participate in person on the shows. Parents participated on the shows using their real names, but this study has created pseudonyms for each participant.

Procedure

This study is based on 11 Spanish-language live call-in shows that were produced in 1998, the first year of *La Placita Bilingüe*. Each show was one hour in duration and included a pre-taped, four-minute mini-drama that introduced the topic. The mini-dramas are original work, written and produced by a talented young bilingual producer who is an immigrant to the United States. Topics that were covered on these shows are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: La Placita Bilingüe Program Topics

Physical Exams for Children
Natividad Medical Center
Language Development
Breastfeeding: Pros & Cons
Divorce: Impact on the Children
Circumcision: Advantages & Disadvantages
How to Handle an Angry Child
Learning Disabled Children
AIDS
Potty Training
How to Talk to Your Teens about Sex

Each live show was audiorecorded and then transcribed in Spanish by the researcher, who is bilingual in English and Spanish. Observational notes taken by the researcher following each production of the show also are part of this study. The taped shows were analyzed and categorized for content and language.

Data Analysis

The role of the researcher was that of participant-observer. She functioned as the executive producer and host of the show during the first year. She interacted regularly with the parents in terms of the planning and execution of the program. On many occasions she provided transportation to the parents because they could not otherwise come to the studios, as there was no public transportation system available to them. It is also important to know that the researcher was a regular volunteer of Radio Bilingüe between 1981 and 1996 and from 2001 to the present, involved in tasks such as programming, news production, translations, fundraising, and so on. Between 1996 and 2001, the researcher was primarily involved as a paid consultant to Radio Bilingüe in the area of development.

Data from the transcriptions were analyzed using an inductive grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop a conceptual framework based on the thick, detailed program transcripts of the interviewees. Notes and memos of the parents' on-air comments were categorized using tentative categories that were later refined and re-coded. Emerging themes common across parents who were in the studio and callers who called in to express an opinion or ask a question were identified and then later subsumed or expanded to accommodate new ones (Patton, 1990). Simple frequency counts, calculated by the number of people stating certain experiences or perceptions, helped identify salient themes.

Findings

Four Main Themes

Four main themes that focused on how parents viewed their parenting roles emerged from the analysis of the 11 talk shows: (1) the special place of children; (2) *saber es poder* – knowledge is power; (3) *querer es poder* – where there is a will, there is a way; and (4) the importance of culture and of being bilingual.

Theme 1: The Special Place of Children in the Family

The data indicated that these Latino parents often think about what is in the best interest of their children, which is consistent with other studies that indicate that for Latinos, the family plays a central role in their lives (Arredondo & Rodriguez, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). A recurring theme throughout the 11 radio programs and personal discussions with parents was the special place of children within the family. This "specialness" can perhaps be viewed in terms of the importance that family has among Latinos, particularly for immigrant Latinos who come from more collectivist societies where the family is supreme (Paniagua, 2005). The following quotes from Teresa, a divorced mother, and Pablo, a young father from a rural village of Central Mexico, address the importance of their children:

If there's a problem and we (spouses) can't be together, one should think first of one's children. For me it was very difficult. But I said, my kids come first. There are many men....The children come first. First are the children. One suffers. But one learns to survive. (Teresa, single mother)

My mother tells us that, if he (father) was without shoes, for example, she would tell him, here, keep this so that you can buy this or that. He would say, no, no, my children are always first. She would always tell us that she didn't have an example of him having mistreated her....When we got married, uh, all the time, she kept telling us, don't fight with your wives. Take care of the children, take good care of them, don't yell at your kids, because I never (emphasis on never) gave you that example and neither did your father....With the daughter that we have, I always talk to her using humor, in the way that they (children) talk, because they have quite an imagination, they talk about everything in their own way. So I always talk a lot to her. (Pablo, father)

Although not many men were guests on the show, the men who did participate on the show were open about the special place of their children in their lives. For example, Daniel very proudly said:

It has been a wonderful experience to have a family, it has helped me a lot...Marisol is very special. She's very tender and at the same time, she's very independent, very active....We do several games. I spend all day with my daughters. But it's not the time, but the quality of time that we give them. I have a schedule for playing with my daughters because I have lots of things to do. During the time that I play with them, they like to play with blocks a lot. They like to make houses. I help them put houses together. That's mainly what they like to play. Once in a while they like to paint. (Daniel, father)

A teacher who visits Daniel as part of her agency's services to help parents confirmed what he was saying:

I visit with Daniel once a month. I really see him participating with his daughters because every month when I ask him, "what has Marisol done this month?" he tells me all the new words, what she has done; he really gives them quality time, enjoys his daughters, and they too enjoy being with him.

Theme 2: Saber Es Poder – Knowledge Is Power

Obtaining information seemed to be a priority for the parents on *La Placita Bilingüe*, as well as for the listeners who called in with comments and questions. Three programs (Circumcision: Advantages and Disadvantages, Toilet Training, and Language Development) had the highest number of callers with people asking basic knowledge-type questions. Dr. Antonio Velasco was the guest expert on the show; following are some of the questions from parents:

I'm so happy to be listening to this program. I have so many doubts about this (male circumcision). When I had my child, he's now four years old, I took Lamaze classes, but I always had some reservations about speaking about this. I had a lot of doubts. I finally decided not to have it done on him, because my husband and I decided that he was going to go through too much pain, and he didn't need it. But now I have a doubt about what is the best way to maintain cleanliness. I bathe him and everything. I heard on TV one time that they were talking about pulling back the skin, and to rinse him when I bathe him. I tried doing this once and my little boy told me that it hurt him. Since then I am afraid to do it. Other people have told me that I need to wait until the child is older, at least to when he's twelve or thirteen years old and then his father can show him. The truth is I've wanted to find information on this and I haven't seen anything. I would like for Dr. Velasco to tell me what is the best way for my child to stay clean and to prevent any future infections? (Female caller)

If they cut him right there, is it so that his penis won't grow or will it grow normal? Because right now, his penis is very tiny, just a little head, and that's another doubt that I have. (Irma, female parent on the show) Congratulations on your program, it's very interesting....I have chosen to do the activity (regarding cleanliness) with my son. But for one reason or another, I have never asked the doctor if how I do it is correct or not. My question is: how much of the penis should come out when I pull his skin? Because I don't know. I don't know if I need to pull his skin more. (Female caller)

What kind of information did these immigrant parents need to help them become better parents? Since many of them have little formal schooling, they rely on radio programs and television for basic information on a variety of topics ranging from issues of sexuality and hospital services to becoming licensed childcare providers. On the potty training program, parents asked, among other things, whether their children were ready to be potty trained, how to begin potty training, and how to continue the training while traveling. The area of sex education also stood out as one requiring much attention. Preventative health, in general, seems to be a high priority because many of these families do not carry health insurance. One parent was amazed that there were experts who could talk on such a variety of topics on *La Placita Bilingüe*.

These examples are not unlike the information gathered by Orozco (2001), whose data suggested that Radio Bilingüe listeners tune in not only to be entertained, but also for information that improves the quality of their lives. Orozco found that people used information heard over the Radio Bilingüe airwaves to request psychological testing for attention deficit disorder, enroll children in the Healthy Families insurance program, to become citizens, and to participate publicly at Migrant Parent Committee meetings, among other things.

Immigrant parents who did not have an opportunity for an education in their home countries often feel vulnerable on their jobs and in their lives in the United States. Perhaps because of this, the desire to have their children succeed is very strong. With the parents who have been a part of this radio program, this desire to help their children has led them to programs like Head Start that encourages parent involvement, ESL classes, GED classes, counseling and support groups, and even programs at the local community college. The majority of the parents who were guests on the show tried to be involved at their children's schools. They were also involved with church groups and extracurricular activities with their children, suggesting that they are making an effort at learning new skills and in accommodating the new system. A few of the parents appeared to be less involved in school activities, but their dedication to being present at the school activities appeared to be important to them.

Theme 3: Querer Es Poder – Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Words from Teresa and other the mothers who participated on the program describe this third theme. Teresa clearly articulated the belief that where there is a will, there is a way. Like many of the other parents who were guests, Teresa's theory of getting ahead is based on the idea that in order to achieve, one must work hard. Teresa is a farm worker raising five children on her own. She has her children in sports, volunteers at her children's schools, and sits on various committees. She believes that she is helping her children by keeping them involved in many extracurricular activities. The hope is always there of creating a better future for her children. As limiting as her present conditions may be, she has bought into the idea that better opportunities lie ahead. She views current barriers following her divorce as temporary problems that will be overcome with hard work, time, and education.

Time passes and one gets more strength, more courage. *Querer es poder, poder es querer*. If you want something, you can achieve it, you have the ability, all you need is the desire....Many times, one thinks, if I leave him, I'm not going to be able to live. It's not true. *Sí se puede*. It can be done. It can be done...I'm going to live for the future, to try and forget, even though you can't, but think instead of the children and see. (Teresa, single mother)

From the beginning, I tried to look at it positively. It was very difficult, but I tried to look at it positively for my children. First of all, I didn't want to talk bad about him to them because I would be influencing their minds negatively. So from the beginning I would talk to them...the three of us would talk. I would tell them that there were only the three of us; that we needed to be real strong; that they needed to help me and that I was going to help them. That's how I've been towards them always. I have talked to them a lot. And I have been with them in school. I go with them everywhere. I have had them in sports. Perhaps that has helped them. I have always supported them. If they want to be in a sport, whatever sport, they have always been in a lot of sports. (Maribel, divorced mother)

Anita (speaking on anger management) is working to overcome personal barriers:

When I first put my son in school I started going to the meetings, I would go to everything that I could. But that wasn't enough. It was not helping me. So one day, I started getting closer to the teacher...I had the opportunity to take classes in Spanish in this area and I began to get closer to the school. And now I have another child, I try, I am different. But

one cannot change from night to day. It is hard, it is hard. You cannot change a negative attitude in a short time. It takes time. Little by little one starts adjusting and that's how, one takes two or three steps forward and one step backwards and that one that went backwards, DARN! (big sigh) One knows that one blew it again. But one continues onward, with the support of my teacher, that is a great teacher whom I admire (refers to another guest on the program), and she has been a blessing from God for me...she has allowed me to see, and I have learned, through her difficult assignments, with the dedication that I have in going to school, I now consider myself a new person. And I, too, am going to begin to work with children. (Anita, mother)

Theme 4: The Importance of Culture and of Being Bilingual

Parents talked about the importance of knowing two languages and how preserving their native language was a vehicle for preserving their culture. These parents also realized that it was up to them to help their children maintain their culture and their language.

It is important to us that our kids learn Spanish because we come from Mexico, and we're going to return, or we are going to go back for a vacation, and it is important that they always speak Spanish because our parents and our families who have never come over here...to be able to communicate with them. If they can only speak English, they will not be able to use their English to communicate with them back there, so it is very important that they not lose the language or our culture. We need to show it to them. (Female caller)

How do parents, despite their own limitations in learning a second language, teach their children to learn a second language?

When my daughter Rosita went to preschool, she was very confused. She saw kids who were speaking English, and she spoke Spanish. She was frustrated because she wanted to communicate with those kids. We had to explain to her that that language is English and that she would be able to speak it, that she would be able to learn how to speak it. And that we had to speak Spanish. She was confused. She would say, "I don't want to talk like that, I want to talk like them. So we had to talk to her. We had to explain to her that we come from Mexico. We speak Spanish. And that she is going to learn English. Now, she's been in preschool almost a year. And she now understands that the children speak English, that she speaks Spanish and that she is going to be able to learn English. It's very important that parents tell their kids that they are going to be able to

speak the language that they want to. Because, in the case of the woman who says that in her house, they speak three languages, the kids can learn three or four or five languages, because, like the teacher says, kids are a sponge. The only thing is, we have to have a lot of patience and dedicate a lot of time to them. (Daniel, father)

I am from a past generation. I am more than 70 years old. Those of us who are first generation here in the United States, it seems that we had an advantage over the people of today. At home, according to my parents' customs, we were not allowed to speak English at all. English was prohibited in our home. We spoke only Spanish, and only Spanish. Our parents would tell us, when you go beyond that door, you speak English and only English, unless it's necessary to speak Spanish. But when you come through that door to the inside, Spanish and only Spanish will be spoken here. As a consequence of that, we learned how to speak Spanish, how to read and write it at a very early age. (Male caller)

(Society) only wants us to speak English. It is very difficult for us. We came to this country thinking that we were only going to work. We did not come here to further our education, our schooling...some of us parents do not know much English...with other people, we can take an interpreter, but with our own kids, it is a little more difficult. Sometimes we get criticized because we don't understand them. (Amanda, mother)

This last caller identifies an issue that parents face when they have not been able to learn English and no longer can communicate with their children. Their goal of achieving success through education becomes precisely the very thing that estranges them from their children. Immigrant parents face language and institutional barriers in the United States (National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations [NCHHHSO], 1996). A role reversal occurs in many instances where the children, who are learning English in school, are put in the position of interpreters for their parents. This situation can be particularly difficult because the traditional Hispanic culture holds its elders – grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles – in high esteem with a deep sense of respect for their advice, opinions, values, and ability to lead and provide for the family. When children are placed in positions of power over the parents, the traditional parental role is undermined, causing damage to the family system. Parents are not the only ones who suffer loss of esteem through the role reversal dynamic; children's self-esteem also suffers as they attempt to assume roles and responsibilities that are beyond their capabilities. Children's natural role models - parents - fall short of their expectations and thus fail to provide the leadership and stability required for the children's developing

self-esteem. Some professionals believe that enhancing the self-esteem of parents through increased knowledge, skills, and competence will result in the long-term development of positive self-esteem in their children (NCHHH-SO). Parent involvement in the schools and society in general, according to Delgado-Gaitan (1990), must help parents acquire social competency and social literacy; the process of becoming literate about a culture is what empowers an individual or a group of individuals to participate fully in that culture.

Discussion

This study suggests that low-income parents are truly concerned about their children, have high hopes for them, and want to be involved in their children's schooling experiences. There is no doubt that immigrant parents bring many strengths with them (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1996). They are risk takers, people who dare to seek a new and improved life. Immigrants form their own folk theory of getting ahead based on the belief that education is the key to a better life (Ogbu, 1991). This general framework leads them to stress education as the way to job success. For this reason, parents admonish their children to obey their teacher, to do their school work, not to fight, keep trying harder, and so on. Immigrants function from a dual frame of reference, comparing their current situation with their former situation (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), allowing them to endure difficult situations with the hope of creating a better future for their children. Often arriving with relatively little formal education, these newcomers are motivated by a desire for a better life, and they aspire to learn English and place their hopes on education as the basis for raising their standard of living (Trueba, 1999). Their present conditions, as limiting as these may be, offer evidence of the possibility of better opportunities in the new environment. Economic, political, and social barriers are viewed as more or less temporary problems that will eventually be overcome with hard work, time, and education. The parents, however, find that their new context takes on added meaning as they struggle to preserve their culture and language in the United States; they realize how integral culture and language become in their new lives. In raising their children, immigrant parents use beliefs and behaviors largely determined by their cultural and socioeconomic status (Zayas & Solari, 1994).

When observing the type of experience that *La Placita Bilingüe* afforded the parents who participated as guests on the program, the researcher observed how their confidence and self-esteem increased. One of the fathers on *La Placita Bilingüe* grew considerably from his participation. This particular father is originally from an isolated village in the highlands of Central Mexico where he

grew up knowing the importance of keeping to himself, because in his town, people settled their own disputes and used violence if they thought it appropriate. At school meetings, he never uttered a word. He and his wife agreed to be on the radio show, but when the live broadcast began, only his wife would make comments. On one of his visits to the live show, he saw a lot of guests and purposely chose a chair that was not part of the main group. The host insisted that he sit with the main group next to his wife and asked him a question to which he comfortably responded. That question broke the ice, and he returned to the live broadcast several times, even when his wife could not make it. Here was a father who found his voice and learned that his opinion was valued. On this radio show, lack of formal schooling was not a barrier. Even though he could barely write, he found himself dialoguing and sharing his ideas with hundreds of listeners. This parent felt respected and honored by the other parents and listeners of the radio show. Other studies (Mapp, 2003) have documented factors that influence parents' increased involvement in their children's education, such as when parents feel that their contributions are honored and when parents are able to establish caring and trusting relationships with school personnel.

Participating on a radio show gave these parents a new perspective of who they are. They began to see that they do know much about parenting and about raising their children. For example, several callers on the potty training program addressed themselves to a parent on the show as often as they did to the guest educator. One listener remarked that the parent spoke so naturally and she sounded "like one of us." That parent is from the state of Michoacán, one of the states in Mexico with the highest number of emigrants. She was once an abused teen mom. With six years of elementary education, she struggled to come to the United States where she remarried and started a new life. She smiled when she talked on the air about how she was raising her three boys. Following her radio participation, she became more active in parent groups and activities at her children's schools. She helped organize a fundraiser at Christmas time to raise money for the school and began volunteering in her children's classrooms, helping prepare materials and working with small groups of children. Regular attendance at a local ESL class became another one of her priorities. All of these new activities point to a new self-confidence discovered by this low-income parent. Not only is she involved in the education of her children, but she is also contributing to the improvement of schools that have high numbers of low-income minority children. The organizing and leadership efforts of this parent illustrate how relations can be transformed between parents and schools. In this new relationship with the school, the parent exercises social capital (Noguera, 2001), deriving status from a position respected by

others. The school also wins by having students who are academically motivated and parents who believe in and support the schools.

The theme of knowledge is power reflects an important value of these parents in that with knowledge comes access to power and access to a better life. At one level, *La Placita Bilingüe* provides simple facts and information. However, at another level, the program offers a space where immigrant families can network, gain new perspectives, feel motivated through mutual encouragement, and learn about indispensable resources like children's health insurance, available library services, special needs of children, and so forth. A key part of the show's secret for success lies beyond giving simple pieces of information to how the information is presented so that it is understandable to low-income parents who have little formal schooling. Information is presented in a culturally appropriate format, using language and style with which people can identify. The richness of the Spanish language and the use of humor, double meanings, and metaphors give the show credibility and appeal to the sensibilities of the community. Listeners of Radio Bilingüe have previously described the programming as credible and serious:

Well for me, it's a station that has a lot of credibility. They give information that is really truthful, and when they inform, they don't just speak for the sake of speaking or because they want to sell something. That's why I like it, because it has lots of credibility. They do give you information as it should be and at a level you can understand. That's very important. The language can be the same one, but depending on how you say it, sometimes it doesn't mean anything. (listener quoted in Orozco, 2001, p. 83)

Recommendations for Educators

Perhaps the strongest recommendation that stands out for educators is the need to approach low-income immigrant Latino parents from a strengths-based perspective. At its simplest level, this means that educators must set aside preconceived notions of low-income parents as not having anything to offer to the education of their children. All parents, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender, race, ability/disability, sexual orientation, or religious orientation, have a rich culture – including their history, language, and traditions – that deserves to be honored, respected, and cultivated. Valuing that background is the basis of a climate that welcomes and calls all parents to be involved in their children's schools. Involvement is a two-way process where parents are knowledgeable about what is taking place with their children's education, and educators understand, embrace, and seek input from the communities from which the children come (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Limitations

The parents in this study are not representative of all Latinos or of all parents who listen or call in to *La Placita Bilingüe*. Since the study involved a relatively small sample size, generalization to the larger population is limited. This study also relies on data that are self-reported. Since these conversations took place publicly, it may also be that individuals were affected by the public nature of the programs and self-embellished, limited their self-disclosure, or under-reported.

Conclusion

Although low-income immigrant parents are often considered apathetic regarding their children's schooling and accused of placing low value on education, this study found that parents were very interested in their children's future through education. This study of parents who had no previous radio experience suggests ideas for building on the cultural strengths of immigrant parents in ways that empower them and help them grow. This study found that these Latino immigrant parents believe that their children are special and want the best for them. These parents are willing to work hard to improve their lives, and they know how important it is to have knowledge or education. On *La Placita Bilingüe*, low-income immigrant parents are considered to be experts in raising their children, and they certainly rise to the expectation.

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